

LOWELL PUBLIC
SCHOOLS

Office of Teaching & Learning
155 Merrimack Street
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852

Phone: (978) 674-4323
E-mail:
rdesmond@lowell.k12.ma.us



Virtual Listening Session with Students

TO: Dr. Joel Boyd, Superintendent of Schools

FROM: Robin Desmond, Chief Academic Officer

DATE: April 2, 2021

The following report is in response to the motion by Jackie Doherty:

Request the Superintendent work with school leadership and student advisory teams at LHS to organize a virtual listening session with students and the school committee to discuss remote learning concerns, options and plans going forward.

Attached please find a report from Lowell High School (LHS) Head of Schools, Michael Fiato, outlining current student listening sessions occurring at LHS.



Michael Fiato
Head of School

Lowell Public Schools
Lowell High School
50 Fr. Morissette Blvd
Lowell, Massachusetts 01852-1050



Tel. (978) 937-8900
Fax (978) 937-8902
Email: MFiato@lowell.k12.ma.us

Student Advisory Council Listening Session Summary

In the first semester of the 2020-21 school year, in an effort to elevate student voice and build and establish foundational relationships between the Student Activities Director, Mr. Thornton, and the Head of School Mr. Fiato, LHS formed the Student Advisory Council. We felt it was incredibly important to build connections with students with the new Head of School, and connect students to the Student Activities Director, especially during remote learning.

The Student Advisory Council consists of 95 students in grades 9-12 who meet by grade level each week. On the following dates, 2/12, 2/26, 3/5, and 3/12, Mr. Fiato and Mr. Thornton met with the Student Advisory Council to:

- Learn more about what was working well in their remote classes,
- Learn more about what hasn't been working well, and
- Learn about some possible solutions to improve their overall experience.

What is working?

- Consistent administration of WIN (*What I Need Days*). Students found WIN Days helpful because it reduces the amount of screen time and allows them time to get caught up on their work. Allows students and staff to take a mental health break with a reduction in screen time.
- Teachers are making weekly check-ins with students.
- Distribution of information going out to the students seems to be helping and improving. The addition of the "Week Ahead" video aids in communication, especially in the remote environment.
- Both students and teachers seem to be getting into regular routines and it has made remote learning more manageable and flexible during the course of the year.



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Head of School*

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What's not Working?

- Students feel that the social isolation of not being in class/school has negatively impacted their high school experience. They miss being with their friends, classmates and teachers and virtual learning, as much as we try, does not replicate that in-person experience.
- Connecting with teachers about assignments is more difficult in remote settings. Asking for extra help, as helpful as the teachers have been, requires additional steps with email or extra screen time.
- Lunch breaks are too short for students who have to go and get lunches for themselves. (Lunches are 30 minutes)
- Students need to be proactive in seeking help and assistance in online classes. Sometimes the pacing is too fast during lessons and a large percentage of students don't signal to the teacher to restate, repeat or clarify.
- Teachers don't always know who needs help during lessons if students are not proactively seeking help.
- The seven period bell schedule results in excessive screen time and a heavy workload.
- Motivation is a challenge when there are distractions at home and students have to tend to other responsibilities.



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- For students who are working, playing a sport or involved in another after-school activity, being on Zoom all day requires a lot of time management and causes lots of stress.

What are some solutions?’

- **Incentives and Awards:** Student of the Month/Week, homework passes, extra credit, rewarding students who show growth in both quizzes as well as homework.
- Mental health time set aside for teachers to meet with students one on one.
- It would be helpful for teachers to allow students to possibly stay in the same breakout rooms so that students cannot just work collaboratively, but also get to talk and socialize a bit with one another.
- Consistent administration of WIN days. There were differing opinions whether WIN days should occur in one day or be spread out during the week.
- Early release days built in more breaks

Next steps:

The Head of School and the Student Activities Director will continue to meet with the Student Advisory Council members on a weekly basis to provide them a forum to share their thoughts about their experiences at Lowell High School. Listening sessions occur every Friday morning. If School Committee members would like to join a listening session, there is a session available on Friday, May 14, 2021, or an evening date could be scheduled at 5:30 pm on Wednesday, May 19, 2021.